

BUILT HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION TEAM

**PROPOSED NORTH PROMENADE CONSERVATION AREA
CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**

August 2018



North Promenade Conservation Area Appraisal

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The concept of conservation areas was introduced in England, Wales and Scotland by the Civic Amenities Act 1967 through a private members bill led by Lord Duncan Sandys. At the time conservation areas legislation was introduced there was widespread public concern over the pace of redevelopment in our historic towns and cities. Today there are over 10,000 conservation areas in the UK.
- 1.2 Blackpool Civic Trust (BCT) was formed in February 1975 to stimulate civic pride and promote high standards of planning and architecture. In 2017 BCT proposed the designation of a new conservation area to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Civic Amenities Act.
- 1.3 This appraisal draws heavily on the detailed assessments of various elements of the proposed conservation area prepared by members of BCT. In addition, the North Promenade Characterisation Report, prepared in 2008 by the Architectural History Practice Limited, which was one of nine commissioned by Blackpool Council, was consulted to provide additional historical background. The majority of illustrative photographs have been provided by BCT.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 A conservation area is an “area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”, as set out in Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 2.2 Under this legislation, local authorities have a duty to designate such areas and to review them, and to use their planning powers to safeguard and enhance the special qualities of these areas within a framework of managing change with a positive approach. Designation automatically entails control over the demolition of unlisted buildings, strengthens controls over minor development and gives special protection to trees within the area.
- 2.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the historic built environment is an irreplaceable resource, and strategies should be developed through Local Plans so that heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.
- 2.4 Policy CS8 of the Blackpool Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy adopted in 2016 states that development proposals will be supported which respect and draw inspiration from Blackpool’s built, social and cultural heritage, and strengthen the existing townscape character created by historic buildings. Developers must demonstrate how any development affecting heritage assets (including conservation areas) will conserve and enhance the asset, its significance and its setting.

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3. Historical Development of Blackpool

- 3.1 Modern Blackpool developed from the medieval manorial holdings of Bispham to the north, Layton to the south, and Marton and Carleton to the east, with each being further divided into townships. A settlement pattern of small nucleations in the manors probably changed little from the medieval period to the 18th century. The reclamation of mosslands, on which Blackpool is built, began in the 16th century. Following reclamation, enclosure of the land for farming led to the development of a small farming community with a few larger farmsteads including Foxhall; farming was supplemented by fishing.
- 3.2 In the early 18th century very few visitors braved the journey to the embryonic resort of Blackpool, which consisted mainly of a few humble cottages straggled along the shoreline and Fox Hall itself, a large late medieval half-timbered house belonging to the Tyldesley family¹. By the end of the 18th century, however, the town had become a fashionable sea bathing resort for the wealthy, and the first visitor accommodation was built to meet this demand².
- 3.3 In the early 1820s the population, excluding visitors, was about 750. The steady growth through the first half of the 19th century was focused along a one mile stretch of coastline. However, further expansion was hampered by the town's relative remoteness and patterns of landholding. The town became more accessible from 1846 with the opening of the Preston and Wyre branch railway to Blackpool North station.
- 3.4 By the 1870s the resident population of Blackpool was around 7,000 and visitor numbers were estimated at more than one million, as the decade saw the first large-scale visitor attractions promoted by entertainment companies, with large-scale theatrical presentations heralding modern show business. The first purpose-built theatre was the Theatre Royal (1868). In 1871 the Raikes Hall estate was sold and the house and its extensive grounds became Blackpool's first large scale entertainment centre which also offered indoor attractions. The Winter Gardens opened in 1878, and by the 1890s Blackpool became the resort with the greatest number of attractions in Europe, crowned by the opening of the Tower in 1894.
- 3.5 Hotels of the period included the Imperial (1867), North Shore, an area developed as an enclave for middle-class residents and visitors.

¹ Eyre, Kathleen *Seven Golden Miles* Dalesman Books, 1989, p. 15

² *Talbot Square Townscape Heritage Initiative Conservation Area Appraisal* Paul Butler Associates, p.4

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4. Historical development of the proposed North Promenade Conservation Area

- 4.1 North Promenade is principally a mid to late 19th century development, with the area north of Gynn Square being mainly early 20th century. The earliest available map of Blackpool, Yates' map of 1786, shows that the North Promenade was probably only a seafront track with no built-up development north of Talbot Square through to the location of the present Gynn Square. North of this the land was coastal terrain, with no development at all.
- 4.2 Early mapping suggests that development north of Gynn Square did not occur until the early 20th century, and a seafront track was the only thoroughfare on the 1893 OS map. The track connected the Gynn Inn with Uncle Tom's Cabin, an entertainment area set up by gypsies in 1810. The cabin was a mix of ramshackle huts around a larger building, located precariously on the cliffs; it was replaced in the 1880s by a public house inland after being undermined by the sea and completely demolished in 1908.
- 4.3 The development of the area south of Gynn Square is linked at its southern end with Talbot Square. A seafront road marked on the 1786 Yates map had disappeared by the time of the 1818 Greenwood map, but appears again on the 1829 Hennet map, leading up to 'The Hill' and 'Ginn'.
- 4.4 By 1877 the Promenade to the north of the Metropole Hotel was in place, having been developed under the Blackpool Land, Building and Hotel Company which was registered in 1863. It was formed to promote the area as one for 'better class' residents and visitors, and therefore a number of large, high-quality hotels were established along Queen's Drive. The 1877 map shows it as a single road labelled as a 'Private Promenade'.
- 4.5 Detailed OS mapping from 1893 shows that the Promenade had been developed to form three adjacent thoroughfares, similar to today: Queen's Drive, Promenade and the Lower Walk. When completed in 1899 the scheme had cost almost £145,000. Toll houses were positioned at the southern end of Lansdowne Terrace and near Gynn Square, enhancing the higher status of the area. Between the Imperial and Gynn Inn were Claremont Park, a large open area with lawn tennis facilities, and a small number of sea-facing terraces, probably boarding houses or small hotels. At its north end Queen's Drive merged into Gynn Square, and the road continued east towards Warbreck.
- 4.6 Until 1900 the tramway extended along the Promenade only as far as Cocker Square, from which date it was extended along Queen's Drive to the Gynn. The stretch from Cocker Square to Dean Street in South Shore was the country's first permanent electric tramway, opened in 1885.

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The Lower Walk, Middle Walk with colonnades, and the upper promenade (Queen's Drive), North Promenade, c.1920

- 4.7 The 1912 OS map shows that a grid of streets had been laid out between the Promenade and the inland areas of North Shore, with some building development occurring north of Gynn Square. Starting at the Metropole Hotel, Queen's Drive was the principal Promenade road and continued along the top of the cliffs to Gynn Square, where it became King's Drive. The Jubilee Gardens were opened in 1912; their original name was North Shore (Sunken) Gardens.
- 4.9 North Promenade from Gynn Square was developed with large hotels, each located on an island site created by the east-west streets. These included the Cliffs Hotel and the Savoy Hydro Hotel (opened 1915), interspersed with sea-facing terraces, first shown on the 1932 OS map. The Cliffs Hotel was built in 1921 and partially rebuilt in 1936-7 at a cost of £80,000 by Halstead Best, an architect responsible for many of Blackpool's new public buildings in the 1930s. Gynn Inn, on the north-east side of Gynn square, was demolished in 1921. The second, locally listed, Gynn Hotel was built in 1939, also designed by Halstead Best,
- 4.10 Improvement works to the coastal defences at the turn of the 20th century enforced a ban on fairground entertainments and stalls, creating a contrasting social zone to that on the Central and South Promenades. The higher status of the area was characterised not only by the large seafront hotels, but by the development of amenities such as the artificial cliffs on the lower walk, a cabin lift with lavatories below (opened 1930), and a large boating pool projecting onto the beach, providing a contrast to the gaiety of the Tower Buildings and piers.

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- 4.11 The Middle Walk colonnades were finished in 1925. The whole structure replaced the grassed slopes between Middle Walk and Queen's Promenade that had been part of the landscaping of the 1895-99 North Shore coastal protection works. The Gynn entrance to these impressive colonnades was signalled by the presence of four massive pillars with urns, lids and finials. They made a bold statement about promenading and Blackpool's unrivalled natural assets. The four pillars framed an entrance to steps leading down to Lower Walk's solitary, smaller colonnade. This entrance had its own smaller four pillars with finials. All four of the smaller pillars are extant, though they have lost their finials, while only two of the massive pillars survive; they too have lost their finials together with the urns.



Large pillars formerly framing the entrance to Lower Walk

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5. Character of the Conservation Area

- 5.1 The character of the proposed conservation area can be summarised as an almost complete townscape of large hotels and leisure features developed in the early to mid 20th century, with two listed buildings (Savoy Garage and Cabin Lift) and a number of locally listed buildings including the Genting Casino, and the Savoy and Cliffs Hotels.



Genting Casino, originally a private residence

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Savoy Hotel

- 5.2 The area between Gynn Square and the grade 2 listed Cabin Lift is characterised by large red-brick hotels, of three to five storeys, with dressings either in yellow sandstone ashlar or terracotta faience. These buildings are set back from the footway, with large forecourts (now used for parking), although many have modern entrances or sun lounge extensions to the front which detract from the historic character of individual buildings.
- 5.3 Other hotels of positive architectural value include the Boston Hotel, the Chequers Plaza (although this has been altered on all elevations), the Crown Plaza, and the Doric. The smaller hotels on the southern edge of Gynn Square are included in the proposed conservation area due to their similar design and materials, and the framework they provide to Gynn Square.

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Seafront hotels



Locally listed former Sherwood Hotel on the southern edge of Gynn Square

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- 5.5 The Grade 2 listed Savoy Garage on King George Avenue, clad with brick and pale buff terracotta, was constructed in 1914-15 as the garage for the Savoy Hydro Hotel.



Savoy Garage

- 5.5 The spatial qualities of the area are also of significance, with the spacious aspect of Queen's Drive, the principal thoroughfare, and the two Promenade walkways to the west with far-reaching views over the sea. There are also good views to the north from the Middle and Lower Walks.
- 5.6 Jubilee Gardens and Gynn Recreation Ground provide large green open public spaces in the centre of the proposed conservation area. The Gynn Square roundabout and car park also add to the open aspect of this area, although the lack of soft landscaping to the car park has a negative impact on the wider area.
- 5.7 The area behind the large hotels is formed from a grid of east-west streets creating blocks between the Promenade and a range of narrow service streets, running north-south. The service streets have high brick walls to the rear of the buildings and back yards, creating a dense building grain in these areas.

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View across Gynn Recreation Ground from the car park



Service lane to the east of the Cliffs Hotel

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- 5.8 The view eastwards from Jubilee Gardens takes in the Gynn Public House and the rows of small hotels encircling the recreation grounds: Finchley Road, Seafield Road, Willshaw Road and the most southerly end of Holmfield Road. The view from Finchley Road also takes in the south end of Holmfield Road.
- 5.9 Middle Walk features five elegant locally listed colonnades linked together, and enclosing, a walkway for almost its entire length, with pathways leading up to the Promenade. The colonnades shape and dominate the character of Middle Walk. They look particularly impressive when viewed from the southernmost end of the proposed Conservation Area. Each colonnade has twenty-four, well-proportioned Tuscan columns, the end columns being coupled with a pillar of a different design. The same type of pillar is to be found integrated with the very substantial supporting structures flanking the colonnades. These tall structures have a Greek Key decorative border that echoes the colonnades' Classical allusions.



Pillar with Greek key detailing on Middle Walk

- 5.10 The Lower Walk forms part of the Lancashire Coastal Way, and consists mainly of a wide pathway framed on one side by artificial cliffs and on the other by the sea or beach according to the tides. At the southern end the new sea defences and walkway are impressive and enhance the area. Looking to the south, it is possible to see in a sweeping glance a number of significant listed buildings including Blackpool Tower (Grade 1), War Memorial (Grade 2*), North Pier (Grade 2) and a Promenade shelter (Grade 2).

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View of listed buildings looking south

- 5.11 Lower Walk is lined with continuous wooden benching on the inland side, which gives way to unadorned concrete seating further along. There is a small, disused pumping station, which once supplied seawater to a water tower (no longer extant) for distribution to local hotels and the Derby Baths (now demolished). Although outwardly unimpressive, the structure forms part of Blackpool's heritage and early history when the benefits of seawater, and Turkish baths in particular, were so vigorously promoted.
- 5.12 A second, concealed but still operational pumping station is located at Gynn Slipway. Its external condition is poor. At this point Lower Walk takes on a different, more spacious, aspect as the view opens up, with the Cabin Lift (Grade 2) and large, former boating pool (locally listed) clearly visible in the distance. The pathway is broader, the artificial cliffs bigger and more prominent. There is a colonnade, the only one on Lower Walk.

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Disused pumping station



Lower walk looking north

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Middle Walk colonnades and Lower Walk



View towards Cabin lift and former boating pool along Lower Walk

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- 5.13 The Cabin Lift forms a prominent focal point, being an impressive structure in its own right. Lower Walk is well provided with street lamps, while there is easy access both to the beach and Middle Walk/Queens Promenade. Life-belts are prominently displayed and rubbish bins are provided. There are two traditional distance markers, though their condition is deteriorating.



North Prom from the air, c.1930, showing part of the artificial cliffs, the cabin lift, boating pool, Uncle Tom's Cabin pub, and 'The Castle', a private residence



Old distance marker, Lower Walk

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6. Spatial attributes, views and open spaces

- 6.1 The spatial character of the area is derived from a combination of the underlying topography and the pattern of superimposed development, generated by the attractions of the sea itself. The Promenade increases slightly in height, rising from 24 metres to around 28 metres above sea level at its northern end.
- 6.2 The view along Queen's Drive, with its straightness at the north end, provides an impressive and far-reaching vista, with the panorama of buildings to the east, and the eye being drawn naturally out to the sea to the west. There are superb views of Morecambe Bay and the distant peaks of the Lake District on a clear day.



View north towards Gynn Square

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- 6.3 In other views along the Promenade, North Pier and the Tower are prominent to the south, and a slight rise in level near Gynn Square provides good views towards the north to the cabin lift. The Middle Walk, colonnades and lower walk contribute significantly to views looking north and out to sea. At Jubilee Gardens there is an open vista looking inland towards Gynn Recreation Ground and Seafield Road beyond. To the west is the sea or beach according to the tides. A number of hotels, including the grade 2 Imperial Hotel, are partially visible to the East (outside the conservation area).



View across Morecambe Bay at dusk

- 6.4 The east-west streets were developed in the 1920s and '30s as wide avenues lined with semi-detached houses. Views down the east-west streets between blocks of buildings frame long distance views, for example of the locally listed Warbreck water tower.

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View towards North Pier from lower walkway headland



Sweeping vista from lower walk at Gynn slipway

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View towards cabin lift from cliff path



View of water tower from the corner of Queen's Promenade/Knowle Avenue

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7. Materials and construction

Structure and roofing

- 7.1 The hotel buildings are primarily of red brick construction, with dressings either in yellow sandstone ashlar or terracotta faience. The latter is particularly prominent on buildings constructed or altered in the 1930s such as the Cliffs Hotel. The Cabin Lift is also of red brick with creamy faience details. The Grade 2 listed Savoy Garage on King George Avenue is faced in sandstone ashlar, and the locally listed Genting Casino (originally a private residence) is constructed mainly of sandstone.
- 7.2 Where roofs are visible (many of the hotels have parapets or gables to the roofline) they were originally of Welsh slate although some have been replaced with modern roof coverings.
- 7.3 Pre-cast concrete has been used extensively in the construction of the colonnades, the walkways linking the colonnades and the raised banks of the walkways. The rear wall and supporting twin pillars are also made of pre-cast concrete.

Doors and windows

- 7.4 No examples of historic joinery were found in the proposed conservation area, probably due to weathering and the need for insulation and sound proofing. However, buildings have generally retained the original fenestration pattern, although the design of the windows is often out of character.
- 7.5 Frontages to hotels are usually of a late 20th century date, and comprise boxy extensions to ground floors, usually with extensive glazing and modern signage.

Boundaries

- 7.6 The principal boundaries on North Promenade are the balustrades on the seaward side of the area between the footway and the lower walkway, and the latter and the sea wall. Those to the upper footway are integral to the colonnade scheme, square in section and geometric in design with Neo-Classical elements. The balustrades are divided into bays by chunky brick piers, rendered, and part of the structure of the cantilevered walkway connecting the bowed colonnades.
- 7.7 Those to the lower walkway are probably of a late Victorian or early Edwardian date and are plain with twisted uprights. This type is also used at the south end of the upper walkway, before the colonnades.

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- 7.8 Other boundaries include concrete 'post and rail' fencing at the north end of the Promenade, and modern galvanised steel barriers to the roadway and tramway.



Piers and balustrades to upper walkway



Balustrades to lower walkway

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Concrete fence at north of Promenade

8. Street furniture

- 8.1 Within Jubilee Gardens there are modern steel benches, and other paraphernalia including rubbish bins and modern signage. A large modern steel archway is located at the entrance to the gardens.
- 8.2 There is some street furniture on the Lower and Middle Walks, for example, fixed, coin-operated telescopes, tall breather poles and metal benches inside the covered walkways linking the colonnades, although many of the latter are in poor condition.

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Jubilee Gardens



Tall breather pipes

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8.3 There is no historic lighting along North Promenade, with streetlights being tall and modern, and doubling as part of the structural frame during the Illuminations.

9. Roads and footways

9.1 The main thoroughfares have tarmac surfaces to both the roadway and tramway. Footways to the main road are also of tarmac with tactile paving to pavement edges and crossing places. The lower Promenade walkway is set with coloured rectangular paviours, and the roadway to the lower walkway is covered with red asphalt.

10. Degree of completeness

10.1 The promenade area to the north of Gynn Square has a feel of completeness which is not apparent in other areas of Blackpool. This is due to the early 20th century setting being retained with only minor alterations, and the buildings themselves retain a large amount of their original character and detailing. As with most of the buildings in Blackpool, original window casements have been replaced with uPVC double-glazed units, although some attempts have been made to keep to the original fenestration pattern, such as on the Cliffs Hotel.



Windows with faience decoration, Cliffs Hotel

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10.2 Other features such as the former boating pool, Cabin Lift, artificial cliffs and the lower and middle walkways (all virtually intact), along with the wide Promenade itself, are notable survivors, although the Promenade itself is now little more than a through-road from the north to the centre of the town. The expansion of the Illuminations has brought additional clutter to the streetscape, but this should also be seen as an intrinsic part of Blackpool's character. There is little other clutter, and the walkways are an important part of the make-up of the town, providing a place for leisurely walks.

11. Archaeological potential

Early mapping suggests that before the Modern era the area was mainly open land or in cultivation with little evidence of human settlement. The remains of any pre-18th century structures along the principal historic routes are unlikely to have survived constant building and rebuilding, and the current state of knowledge suggests that the archaeological potential is low. Further advice on specific sites should be sought from Lancashire County Council in advance of major redevelopment.

12. Negative issues

12.1 As discussed, the proposed conservation area benefits from a high level of completeness. Conservation area designation seeks to retain existing character, and encourage enhancement where modern interventions have resulted in a loss of historic character, for example by uPVC replacement windows, the erection of sun lounges and smoking shelters.



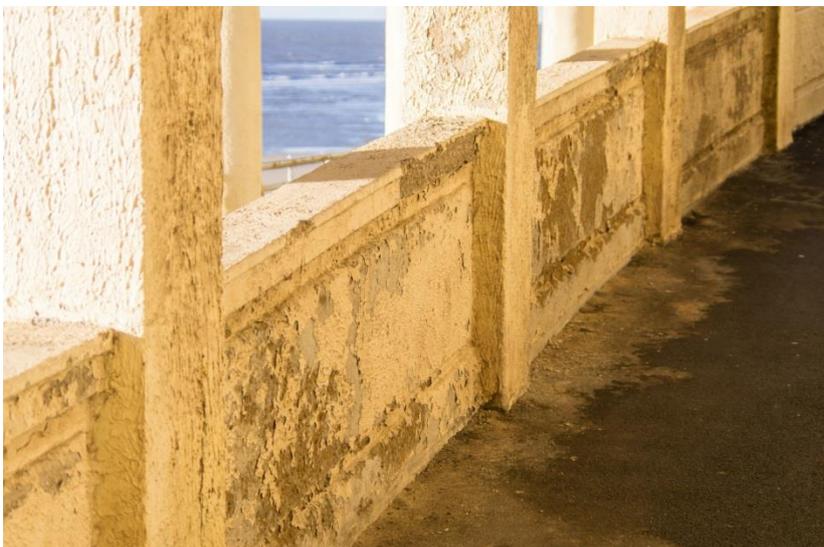
Smoking shelter, Cliffs Hotel

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- 12.2 The conservation area survey revealed that poor maintenance is an issue which affects the visual amenity of the area. The colonnades and twin pillars to the Middle Walk are in need of cleaning and painting, while the panelled sides of the interior paths to the Promenade are in poorer condition with paint flaking off ten side panels. The physical fabric of the colonnades shows some minor signs of deterioration. The capitals of twelve of the columns have been repaired or are in need of repair. There are signs of the concrete itself corroding, though to a minor degree only. The colonnade on the Lower Walk is also in need of repair and redecoration.



Railings in need of repainting



Interior paintwork to enclosed walkway

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- 12.3 The metal benches inside the covered walkways linking the colonnades are in very poor condition and are badly rusted, and a rusty container unit appears to be permanently parked by the side of the southernmost colonnade.



Rusting bench

- 12.4 Some of the boundary treatments are also in need of repair, for example the concrete fencing and metal railings.



Corroding concrete fencing

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Corroding balustrade

- 12.5 The banked pathways leading up to the colonnades are well maintained with sound tarmac surfaces and the provision in some cases of metal handrails/railings. The concrete flags covering the raised banks have worked loose in several areas; some have come away completely and require attention.
- 12.6 The Grade 2 cabin lift is in a state of disrepair with cracking to the tower, broken windows and rusting doors. The copper roof was replaced a few years ago to remedy water ingress, and repairs were carried out to the faience, but the building continues to deteriorate. A new use, and perhaps a new owner, needs to be found in order to ensure that the building is saved for future generations.

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Entrance to non-functioning lift from Lower Walk

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Badly rusting doors to disused toilets under Promenade lift entrance



Plant growth on decorative faience

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13. Next steps

- 13.1 A public consultation will be carried out prior to the designation of a North Promenade Conservation Area. Representations made during the consultation will be included in a final report to the relevant Cabinet member for formal adoption of the conservation area appraisal. This process will confirm designation. Public consultation will be through publication of the proposal on the Council website, and copies will be made available in Central Library. Site notices will also be displayed throughout the proposed conservation area.
- 13.2 Following designation a conservation area management plan will be produced, which will include recommendations for heritage protection. The plan will analyse what is positive and negative, and identify opportunities for beneficial change or the need for additional protection through the use of article 4 directions to remove a number of permitted development rights. The use of article 4 directions would help to protect vulnerable features such as boundary walls, and thereby maintain the character and special quality of the conservation area.

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